DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 359 383 CE 064 014

AUTHOR	Bernstein, Joan D.; And Others
TITLE	Barriers to Women Entering the Workforce: Knowledge and Attitude toward Nontraditional Careers. Research Bulletin No. 4.
INSTITUTION	Montclair State Coll., Upper Montclair, NJ. Life Skills Center.
PUB DATE	92
NOTE	6p.; For full report summarized here, see CE 064 013.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
JOURNAL CIT	New Jersey Equity Research Bulletin; n4 Fall 1992
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Career Awareness; *Career Choice; Demography; *Education Work Relationship; *Females; *Nontraditional Occupations; Secondary Education; Secondary School Students; State Surveys; *Student Attitudes; *Work Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS	New Jersey

ABSTRACT

One of four research projects designed to examine barriers to entrance of women into the workforce, the study described in this bulletin examined the relationship between knowledge of nontraditional careers and attitudes toward them. Questionnaires were administered to 1,755 students from 12 New Jersey school districts to determine their attitudes toward and knowledge of nontraditional careers. Most of the students (89 percent) held positive attitudes toward nontraditional careers. Only 49 percent of the students demonstrated a high level of knowledge about nontraditional careers, however, and 16 percent of the respondents had a moderately low to low level of knowledge about such careers. Students with higher levels of career knowledge were more likely to have positive attitudes toward nontraditional careers. Older students, students enrolled in vocational-technical schools, unmarried childless students, and Caucasian and African-American students were most knowledgeable about nontraditional careers. Males, older students, and students enrolled in comprehensive schools were less likely to be accepting in their attitudes toward females in nontraditional roles. Unmarried and Caucasian respondents were more likely to be accepting toward nontraditional careers. Activities such as nontraditional career bulletin boards, role model panels, field trips, and information sessions for guidance counselors were recommended as ways of increasing students' knowledge and acceptance of nontraditional careers for females. (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED359383

BARRIERS TO WOMEN ENTERING THE WORKFORCE: KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE TOWARD NONTRADITIONAL CAREERS

RESEARCH BULLETIN NO. 4

Life Skills Center
Montclair State College

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

L Kelly

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CE 064014

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

New Jersey Equity Research Bulletin

Fall, 1992 *Life Skills Center, Montclair State* *Research Bulletin No. 4*

Barriers to Women Entering the Workforce: Knowledge and Attitude Toward Nontraditional Careers

JOAN D. BERNSTEIN, ED.D.,
Project Director
LINDA B. REILLY, PH.D.,
Principal Investigator
JOANNE F. COTÉ-BONANNO, M.A.,
Project Coordinator

The New Jersey Division of Adult and Occupational Education through funding from the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act sponsored four research studies to examine the barriers which impact on the entrance of women into nontraditional careers. A career is considered nontraditional if it is engaged in by seventy five percent or more of the opposite gender. The Life Skills Center of Montclair State studied the following barriers: math anxiety; student's knowledge of and attitudes toward nontraditional careers; sexual harassment; and student and educator attitudes toward women in nontraditional careers.

Purpose

The purpose of the research project was to study the relationship between knowledge of nontraditional careers and attitudes toward them. The characteristics of the participants were examined to gain information about those students who had more positive attitudes toward nontraditional careers. Lack of knowledge about careers limits entry into occupations which could be both personally and financially rewarding to females. Negative attitudes about females in nontraditional roles has been considered to be an additional impediment to women making nontraditional career choices. Understanding the feelings which students have about nontraditional careers and increasing knowledge about the types of career choices available is essential in planning career preparation programs for students.

Research has indicated that negative attitudes toward nontraditional careers may be the result of feelings that participation in nontraditional occupations will have negative consequences on romantic and social interests. Women engaged in male dominated occupations have been thought to be the least desirable romantic partners and were least often chosen by other women as same gender friends. Negative social sanctions may be an important contributing factor in the lack of interest on the part of women to pursue nontraditional careers. (Condry and Dyer, 1976; Hagen and Kahn, 1975; and Pfost and Fiore, 1990).

Fear of success may also be a deterrent to females aggressively pursuing careers in nontraditional areas. Young girls learn that expressing strong career interests is not considered appropriate female behavior. Children are likely to pursue careers which are compatible with their social status and with which they are familiar (Horner, 1968; Hannah and Kahn, 1989). Lack of knowledge about nontraditional careers is a deterrent to females. McLure and Peil (1978) report a general lack of information on the part of female students about careers. Students lack interest in learning about nontraditional careers because they anticipate negative consequences in interpersonal relationships and because they perceive masculine occupations to be inappropriate to the gender roles they learned as young children.

This study was conducted during the 1991-92 academic year with school districts who had received gender equity training funds under the Carl D. Perkins Act. Participants in the study were 1,755 students from twelve school districts located throughout New Jersey. Student's attitudes toward nontraditional careers were measured by asking the students to indicate their degree of agreement/disagreement with a series of statements concerning nontraditional career roles. Most of the students (89%) held positive attitudes about nontraditional careers.

Knowledge about nontraditional careers was measured by asking the student to identify the preferred training program for a series of trade and technical occupations and apprenticeship programs, and to indicate which of two job categories was likely to pay a higher salary. A large percentage of the students' scores (49%) were high in knowledge about nontraditional careers while a smaller percentage (16%) were in the moderately low to low knowledge group.

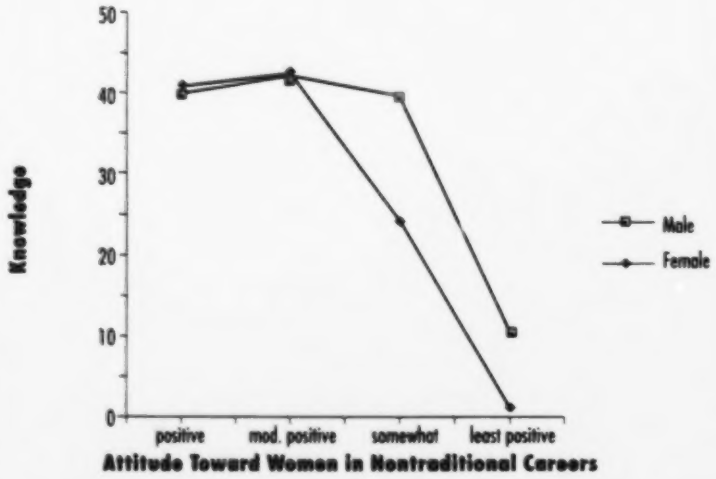
Demographic Profile of Participants (n=1755):

- Age
  - range - 12-20 years
  - median age - 14 years
  - average age - 14.7 years
- Gender
  - 50 % male
  - 50 % female
- Race and ethnic composition of the sample:
  - 21 % Caucasian
  - 24 % African American
  - 17 % Hispanic
  - 9 % Asian
  - 6 % Native American

Findings: Knowledge and Attitude Toward Nontraditional Careers

- Students who were higher in level of knowledge were more likely to be positive in their attitude toward nontraditional careers. This finding indicates that increased knowledge about nontraditional careers was likely to result in acceptance and a more positive attitude toward nontraditional careers.
- **Knowledge** level was found to be significantly related to:
  - *Age* - As the students' age increased they were generally more knowledgeable.
  - *Type of School* - Students enrolled in vocational technical schools were more knowledgeable than students enrolled in comprehensive schools.
  - *Marital/Parental Status* - Students who were single without children and married without children were the most knowledgeable about nontraditional careers.
  - *Race* - Students of Caucasian and African American heritage were found to be most knowledgeable.

Fig. 1 Knowledge and Attitude as Related to Gender



- **Attitude** toward nontraditional careers was found to be significantly related to:
  - *Gender* - Males were found to be more traditional in their views than females.
  - *Age* - As the students' age increased they were generally less accepting of females in nontraditional roles.
  - *Type of School* - Students enrolled in comprehensive schools were less likely to be accepting in their attitudes than those in vocational technical schools.
  - *Marital Status* - Single students were more likely to be accepting in their attitudes.
  - *Race* - Caucasian participants were more likely to be accepting in their attitudes toward nontraditional careers than other racial/ethnic groups.
- **Knowledge, Attitude, and Gender**

  Examination of the relationship between knowledge and attitude as related to gender indicated that both males and females who are high in knowledge were more positive in their attitudes about nontraditional career choices. Males were found to be more knowledgeable than females; however, females were more likely to be accepting of nontraditional choices. Those with the least knowledge about nontraditional careers were the least positive in their attitudes about career choices (See Fig. 1).
- **Knowledge, Attitude and Age**

  Knowledge was found to be significantly related to age. As students grew older, they became somewhat more knowledgeable about careers. Although gender was not significantly related to knowledge, slight differences were exhibited between males and females. (See Fig. 2.) **Attitude** toward nontraditional careers was significantly related to both gender and age. Females were generally more positive in their attitudes than males. The differences between the genders were most pronounced at age 17 when females were consider-

ably more positive in their attitude than were males. This is a stage of life when students are seriously considering their future careers. Female students appear to be more accepting of nontraditional career options than male students. These differences may be a reflection of the gender equity training projects which have been taking place in the participating schools during the past three years. Students who are younger seem to be more accepting of nontraditional careers than those who are older and who have more defined attitudes toward their career options. (See Fig. 2).

Conclusions and Recommendations:

Attitudes toward nontraditional careers were found to be strongly related to career knowledge. Students who know more about the training necessary and the salary potential of various occupations are more likely to have a positive attitude toward nontraditional career choices. Students tend to pursue careers which are familiar to them and in which family members are employed. By increasing their level of knowledge about a wider variety of options, a more varied selection of careers will be considered by women. Traditional male occupations have rewarded employees with both higher status and higher salaries than occupations traditionally held by women. If women enter these traditionally male careers, they should be able to support themselves and to contribute financial resources to the family's welfare.

Students who have positive attitudes toward nontraditional careers tend to be those who know the most about them. Knowledge contributes to a more positive attitude toward these types of careers. Research has also shown that women who engage in nontraditional careers may suffer stress as a result of their career choices. In spite of this, women who know more about a particular career are more likely to be accepting of that career.

Barriers to nontraditional career choices can be overcome by increasing students' awareness of nontraditional job descriptions and characteristics. Activities such as nontraditional career bulletin boards, role model panels, field trips to observe nontraditional employees at work, information sessions for guidance counselors, newspaper articles about students who have succeeded in nontraditional careers, integration of nontraditional career examples into all subject matter areas, and training programs such as ASETS (Achieving Sex Equity Through Students) will help students in making more diverse and personally rewarding career choices.

Fig. 2 Attitude as Related to Age and Gender

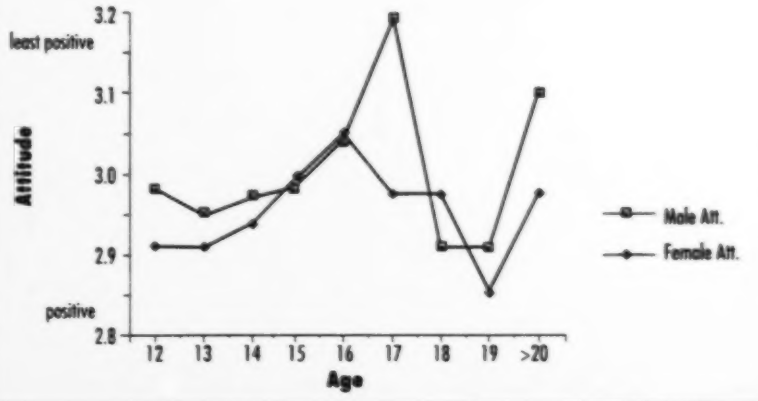
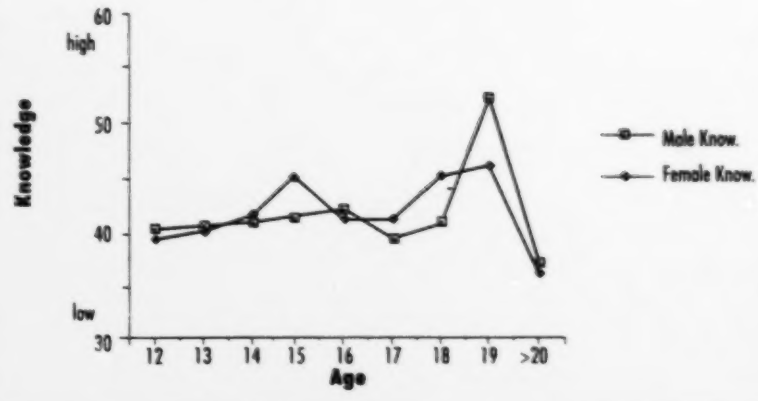


Fig. 2 Knowledge as Related to Age and Gender



Bibliography:

Condry, J., and Dyer, S. (1976). Fear of success: Attribution of cause to the victim. Journal of Social Issues, 32, 63-83.

Hagen, R.L. and Kahn, A. (1975). Discrimination against competent women. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 5, 362-376.

Hannah, J., and Kahn, S. (1989). The Relationship of Socioeconomic Status and Gender to the Occupational Choices of Grade 12 Students. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 34, 161-178.

Horner, M.S. (1972). Toward an understanding of achievement related conflicts in women. Journal of Social Issues, 28, 157-175.

McLure, G.T., and Piel, E. (1978). College bound girls and science careers: Perceptions of careers and facilitating factors. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 12, 172-183.

Pfost, K., and Fiore, M. (1990). Pursuit of Nontraditional Occupations: Fear of Success or Fear of Not Being Chosen? Sex Roles, 23, 15-23.

Participating School Districts:

Bayonne Public Schools, Essex County Vocational Technical School, Gloucester County Vocational Technical School, Irvington Public Schools, Mercer County Vocational Technical School, Middlesex County Vocational Technical School, Monmouth County Vocational Technical School, Newark Public Schools, Paramus Public Schools, Pinelands Regional School District, and Sussex County Vocational Technical School.

This is a summary of research funded by the New Jersey Department of Education, Division of Adult and Occupational Education, P.L. 101-392, through a grant to the Life Skills Center at Montclair State College. For further information and complete data, please contact the **Life Skills Center, Montclair State, Upper Montclair, NJ 07043.**